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ABSTRACT

Paradoxically, educators can be quite successful at building the necessary community coalitions around their restructuring efforts and yet experience isolation from their peers who are also engaged in restructuring work. This publication describes outcomes of a program that linked schools working to implement the Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). CES is a high school-university partnership that works to redesign the American high schools for better learning and achievement. The SBC Foundation (SBCF), which is administered by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), provided grants to nine self-selected networks or clusters of schools in Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas. This report summarizes major findings and results of cluster activities that took place during 1994-95. The clusters facilitated a sense of ownership among faculty and staff; community and student involvement; respect and trust among peers; an opportunity to assess progress; and resource sharing. Factors that impeded collaboration included scheduling conflicts, leadership change, political opposition, and geographic distance. Elements of effective interschool cooperation include a clear understanding of vision and goals, inclusiveness/ownership, diverse membership, administrative mechanisms that support the network, adequate funding and resources, university alignment, documentation of accomplishments, and commitment. A summary of each cluster school's accomplishments is included. Contact information is provided for Re:Learning, school clusters, and the Coalition of Essential Schools. The appendix includes the nine common principles of the CES. (LMI)

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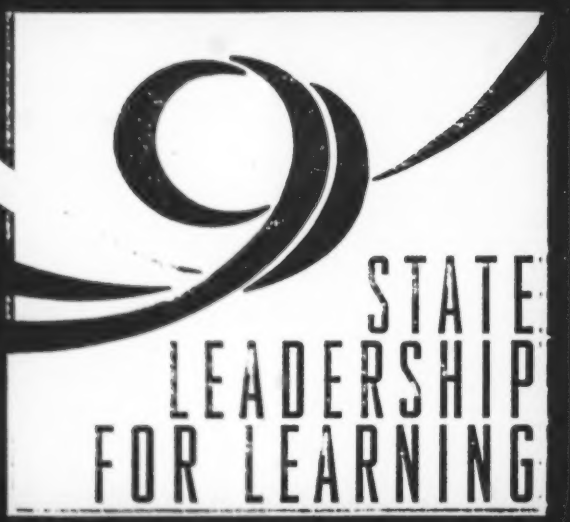

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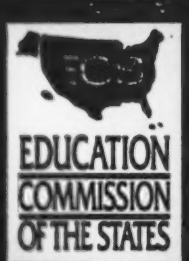

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HOW COLLABORATION CONTRIBUTES TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

STATE LEADERSHIP
FOR LEARNING

October 1996

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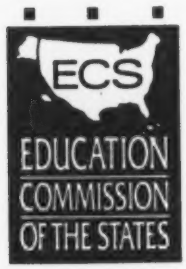

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John Schroeder of CorpWrite Ltd. compiled and synthesized the information. Deborah Clemmons of ECS and Beverly Simpson of the Coalition of Essential Schools facilitated development of the project, as well as this publication.

Introduction

School improvement never occurs in a vacuum. That is one of the first lessons educators learn when they set out to improve student achievement at their schools. To implement reforms, and make them stick, educators must begin by building support among all those who have a stake in the process — not only principals, faculty and students, but also parents, administrators, business leaders, elected officials and members of the community at large.

"Our colleagues are our best resources. We have learned from each other's trials and errors, successes and failures. Acquired expertise has been eagerly shared ... and has served as a catalyst for school improvement."

North Kansas City
High School
Kansas City Cluster II

Paradoxically, educators can be quite successful at building the necessary community coalitions around their restructuring efforts and yet experience another potentially limiting type of isolation — isolation from their peers who also are engaged in restructuring work.

"We've learned that having conversations with other schools can lead to more reflection and self-awareness. Our visits to other schools have caused our teachers to think critically about the other schools in the cluster, as well as their own."

Fulton High School
Mid-Missouri Cluster

For the past two years, the SBC Foundation (SBCF) has funded a program designed to reduce this isolation by creating and enhancing links among schools working to implement the Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). CES is a high school-university partnership that works to redesign the American high school for better learning and achievement. With the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the coalition sponsors Re:Learning, a partnership with participating states to build support for change at the state and district levels. The SBCF program, administered by ECS, provided grants to nine self-selected networks or clusters of schools in three states with CES member schools: Arkansas, Missouri and Texas.

The grants were intended to fund collaborative activities that would give participating school staffs opportunities to share promising ideas and practices and to develop strategies for improving learning. In the first year of the program, $20,000 grants were awarded to qualifying clusters of three or more schools. In year two, school clusters received grants of $3,000 to $5,000.

All participating schools reported their work together helped to move the school-improvement process forward, and most are continuing to develop new opportunities to meet, share, cross-train, mentor and deepen their work around CES' Nine Common Principles (see appendix on page 21). In some cases, however, the collaborative efforts proved difficult to

"This grant has helped the students at Harrisburg High School by giving them the opportunity to attend student forums. The grant allowed them to visit other schools and meet new people. It made them realize that we at HHS have the same problems as anyone else ... that we can change HHS ... and that change needs to be made in small steps."

Harrisburg High School
Northeast Arkansas Cluster

"It's positive to see that so many of us are trying to change things. Maybe together we'll change the system."

Ritenour High School
St. Louis Cluster II

"Networking has enhanced teacher learning by fostering teacher interaction. Through interaction, we were able to learn new methods of teaching as well as problem solving. As a direct result, students ... are exposed to innovative ways of teaching. Learning becomes fun again, and students enjoy learning."

Madison High School
Greater Houston Regional
Networking Cluster

sustain because of various factors, such as changes in school leadership, geographic separation and inadequate funding.

This report summarizes the major findings and results of the cluster activities that took place from 1994-95. It consists of a three-part summary ("Cluster Activities: An Overview," "How Clusters Made a Difference" and "Designing a Successful School Cluster") gleaned from reports submitted by cluster participants and a more detailed summary of the experiences of each cluster. Verbatim comments from various cluster reports appear throughout this document to provide additional insights into the effectiveness of the clusters' activities.

Cluster Activities: An Overview

Not surprisingly, the three dozen schools involved in SBCF clustering activity found a wide range of projects and activities in which to invest their grant money. Their efforts reflect both the breadth of the work already under way at the schools and the different stages of development that characterized each cluster.

"School visits and exchanges continue to broaden our understanding of the possibilities for change in education. Sharing trade secrets has long been the accepted method of transfer of knowledge in other professions."

Benton High School
Kansas City Cluster II

The most common activities undertaken by the clusters included:

- Professional Development/Inservice Workshops
  - Alternative assessment
  - Peer coaching
  - Block scheduling
  - Nine Common Principles
  - Integrated curriculum
- School Visits/Student and Teacher Exchanges
- Student Forums
- Planning Retreats
- Study/Discussion Groups
- Networking Technology/Internet Connections
- CES Fall Forum Participation (annual meeting of people interested in CES ideas)
- Summer Institute Participation
- Professional Resource Library

"Our regional cluster features schools that are grappling with the same issues and yet are quite different from each other. This diversity offers great promise. By networking with schools at once similar and different, we can gain insight into issues and practical approaches that we once overlooked."

Parkway South High School
St. Louis Cluster I

The grants were used to offset expenses incurred in carrying out cluster activities. Typically, these expenses included:

- Substitutes/Teacher Release Time
- Travel/Transportation Expenses
- Meeting/Food Service Expenses

"Schools in a cluster should have a common interest in the type of restructuring that each school is trying to achieve. This commonality will benefit each school, its staff, students and community."

Hoxie High School
Northeast Arkansas Cluster

"Networking impacts my teaching on a daily basis, through monthly networking meetings, news group (e-mail) and newsletters. I download often and take part in instructional discussions with other educators from across the country. Keeping current on instructional strategies and educational issues improves my classroom techniques, and more importantly, my students' performance."

Westbury High School
Greater Houston Regional
Networking Cluster

"I enjoyed the presentations. I do enjoy more opportunities to share ideas, concerns, suggestions with other staff members. I generally see teachers from other schools once a year, unless something special arises. The sharing is greatly needed."

Ritenour High School
St. Louis Cluster II

- Registration Fees
- Purchases of Resource Materials
- Honoraria for Workshop Leaders/Speakers
- Supplies/Administrative Expenses

How Clusters Made a Difference

In general, schools that participated in the SBCF cluster grant program reported the activities produced many positive results. The school participants expected, at a minimum, that they would benefit from increased exposure to ideas such as block scheduling, assessment of student mastery, 1:80 teacher/student loads, and teacher-as-coach/student-as-worker techniques. In virtually every case, participants reported additional — and often unexpected — benefits to their collaborative activities.

Among the results reported by cluster participants were a number of synergies that added to the depth and quality of the school-improvement work being done at the individual school level. These synergies included:

- **An increased sense of ownership for change among faculty and staff.** A school's exploration of CES principles often was deepened and broadened by staff's ability to interact with other schools working through the same issues and experiences.
- **Community involvement.** Getting CES work done "outside the building" led to a greater commitment — and more opportunities — to involve the community at large in the change process.
- **Student involvement.** In several cases, the schools' joint efforts led to more involvement of students in the change process. Students had opportunities to visit other schools and see how schools are alike and how they are different.
- **Greater respect/trust among peers.** Teachers gained an appreciation for the professionalism of their counterparts at other schools and for the progress their peers were making toward school-improvement goals.

"Change is gradual. The foundations for change must be carefully constructed and reinforced along the way. Impatience with the pace must not be used as an excuse to take short cuts, for our success thus far can be largely attributed to the evolution of interest and commitment of our staff."

Belton High School
Kansas City Cluster II

"The central lesson to be drawn from our work is that change is not a single event. It is, instead, a continuous process. A shift in focus toward school improvement requires schoolwide consensus on clear and focused educational goals, with more support for teachers and students."

Greater Houston Regional Networking Cluster

"We need to know how reform is taking place in other schools, and we need to know what 'outsiders' perspectives are on our own plans to carry out reform efforts. We need whatever insight we can glean from others."

Kirkwood High School
St. Louis Cluster I

"Dialogue is important. Include as many people as possible in the conversation: Parents, students, faculty, administration and noncertified staff."

Raymore-Peculiar High
School Kansas City Cluster I

"Because of a concerted effort by all five schools in our cluster, Ritenour's work will have much greater credibility and visibility both inside and outside its community. This credibility and visibility should help us overcome the barriers of energy and tradition."

Ritenour High Schoo
St. Louis Cluster

- **Reality check.** Clustering activities gave participating school staffs the opportunity to assess their progress compared to other schools in the community, to observe their peers in action and to share strategies and success stories across district lines.
- **Resource sharing.** Faculties had many opportunities to participate in joint staff-development activities and workshops and to share their unique skills or expertise through cross-training activities.

In addition to these synergistic benefits, participants in the Missouri clusters reported their work contributed to the establishment of two Re:Learning Regional Centers in 1995. These centers will serve as focal points for networking and professional development activity.

Despite the widely reported benefits of collaborative activities, participants did not consider clustering a panacea for a successful school-change process. Clustering proved to be a valuable tool for strengthening the process at schools that were able to maintain and deepen their own momentum for change. On the other hand, it did little to provide new momentum in situations where individual schools experienced roadblocks to change or encountered community opposition.

Several factors emerged as the most serious impediments to collaboration. They included:

- **Time/scheduling conflicts.** School staffs often had trouble finding mutually agreeable dates or time slots in which to work together. In addition, individual school needs (for accreditation reviews, etc.) sometimes drew a staff's energy and resources away from clustering work and resulted in inadequate follow-through.
- **Leadership change.** In some cases, restructuring work lost its momentum when principals left. This leadership vacuum contributed to the dissolution of two school clusters.
- **Political opposition.** Opponents of outcomes-based education were wary of CES-related activities — including school clustering — in several communities in Missouri and Arkansas. Clustering proved to be an advantage for schools in Northeast Arkansas, where staffs shared strategies for answering political opposition and building strong community support for restructuring.

- **Geographic distance.** Most of the clusters funded by the SBCF grant program involved schools that were no more than 30 to 40 minutes apart by car. Participants in more geographically dispersed clusters found it difficult to sustain their work because of the extended drive times (one to two hours) required for cluster meetings.

"Locally, networking serves as a catalyst to bring about change in our high school. Our faculty no longer feels a sense of isolation from their colleagues, and they are well on their journey to becoming part of the larger educational community."

Madison High School
Greater Houston Regional
Networking Cluster

"So often, the workshops now offered make me feel obsolete. It seems everything needs to be thrown out. But these sessions helped clarify that everything I do is not to be thrown out: Just put a new twist to it."

Ritenour High School
St. Louis Cluster II

"The cluster grant has helped teachers at Harrisburg High School by helping us form a special bond. It has made us more open-minded. It has helped us form a network or connections throughout the state. It has given us opportunities to learn new techniques to use in the classroom."

Harrisburg High School
Northeast Arkansas Cluster

"Help is out there, perhaps as close as a neighboring school or university. Don't be afraid to ask for help ... or to offer assistance. Stress communication. Involve as much of the faculty as possible."

Fayette High School
Mid-Missouri Cluster

Designing a Successful School Cluster

What is the secret to effective inter-school collaboration? This topic was explored in depth at a March 1996 workshop in which representatives from more than a dozen schools discussed their experience with clustering. Meeting participants included teachers and administrators from six of the school clusters that received SBCF grants in 1994 and/or 1995.

Perhaps the most significant finding to emerge from the workshop is that there is no single best way to design a school cluster. Rather, the participants concluded, successful collaborations should be organized to address the needs and accomplishments of their members. Participants recommended that the effort begin with a number of planning considerations, including:

- **Vision and goals.** Clustering should be seen as a tool, not as an end in itself. The most successful school clusters grow out of a clear understanding about what member schools expect to achieve.
- **Inclusiveness/ownership.** Every effort should be made to include a broad cross-section of people in the activities of the cluster, including faculty, administrators, students and community leaders. The objective should be to expand the conversation about school change in order to increase "ownership" in the process.

- **Diversity.** Cluster membership should be sufficiently diverse to provide a variety of perspectives on the issues and challenges associated with long-term school change.
- **Administration/"mechanics."** School clusters require a substantial commitment of staff time and energy. Each member school should have a cluster coordinator who is responsible for communication and follow-up with other staffs. If possible, e-mail or similar technology should be used to facilitate inter-school communications.
- **Funding/resources.** Clustering activities can lead to unbudgeted expenses for teacher release time, substitutes, resource materials, travel costs, etc. The planning process should include efforts to identify ongoing sources of funds, including local business partners, to support the schools' collaborative work.
- **University alignment.** The cluster's work can be significantly enhanced by the participation of teacher-educators and schools of education faculty. Where possible, the cluster's membership should include links to local university resources.
- **Documentation.** Cluster members should make an effort to document their activities as a way of measuring accomplishments and encouraging continued progress toward the group's stated goals.
- **Commitment.** Like the entire process of school improvement, effective clustering takes time, and participants should not expect to see results overnight. In fact, benefits may take years to accrue, as participating school staffs work to build trust and respect across their networks.

"Our cluster is very diverse in location, school size and culture. Through this collaboration, the teachers have found that they face the same issues regarding change."

Center High School
Kansas City Cluster I

"The coalition has been professionally invigorating to me as a school administrator. It has provided the pipeline to other like-minded educators."

LaPorte High School
Greater Houston Regional
Networking Cluster

"We've learned that a vision of what we are and where we're going needs to be articulated and shared by all; not so much that everyone is ecstatic about the vision; rather, that each person understands it and believes it is what's best for our children."

Harrisonville Middle School
Kansas City Cluster I

The Impact of School Clusters: A Detailed Review

A total of nine school clusters received funding during the first and/or second year of the SBCF grant program. Results varied by cluster, but virtually all participants reported that the program had a positive impact on their school improvement efforts.

A majority of the schools involved in the program will continue their clustering activities into the 1996-97 school year. A summary of each cluster's accomplishments, current status, and findings and results follows.

Northwest Arkansas Cluster

Participating Schools

Siloam Springs High School
Siloam Springs Middle School
Fayetteville High School
Springdale High School

1994-95 Activities

- Workshop on Coalition of Essential Schools Principles (26 participants).
- Workshop on alternative assessment techniques.
- Peer coaching workshop (16 participants).
- Block scheduling workshop.
- Research visit: St. Louis Institute of Teaching and Learning.

Total Expenditures

$12,760

Current Status

Cluster disbanded because of scheduling conflicts, inadequate means of communication among member schools, and resignations of Fayetteville and Springdale school districts.

Findings/Results

The cluster proved effective in creating a critical mass of schools involved in restructuring work. Participating school districts scheduled more professional development activities, and faculties had more opportunities to share their knowledge with their peers at other schools.

Northeast Arkansas Cluster

Participating Schools

Nettleton High School, Jonesboro
Harrisburg High School
Ridgecrest High School
Hoxie High School

1994-95 Activities

- Two workshops on Coalition of Essential Schools Principles (29 teachers, 7 administrators).
- Established informal support network for teachers and administrators involved in school change.
- Teacher Study Groups formed to discuss current literature.
- Monthly inservice workshops scheduled at each cluster school.

Total Expenditures

$20,000

Current Status

Two cluster schools encountered resistance to change from opponents of outcomes-based education in early 1995. Cluster activities have resumed, following a hiatus to build strong community support for restructuring efforts. Cluster will apply for SBCF grant in 1996 to continue and expand its work, with a long-term goal of building a cluster of 12 to 16 schools.

Findings/Results

The formation of the cluster helped individual schools increase local support for changes. Networking gave teachers and administrators a local peer resource to help with problems and ideas. Cluster schools learned to share knowledge through inter-school visits, cooperative inservice workshops, etc.

South Central Arkansas Cluster

Participating Schools

Arkansas High School
Alternative Learning Environment
College Hill Junior High
North Heights Junior High

1994-95 Activities

- Inservice workshop to discuss Nine Common Principles and develop a common school improvement agenda.
- Student forums.
- Establishment of e-mail network to serve as primary means of communication among cluster schools.
- Regularly scheduled cluster meetings, giving teachers opportunities to discuss school improvement topics.

Total Expenditures:
$20,000

Current Status

Cluster activities are continuing, including workshops involving teachers and staff at each member school, a faculty retreat in June 1996 and student forums. All four schools intend to implement alternative scheduling on at least a limited basis in the 1996-97 school year. Additional work will focus on building support for school improvement among a broader range of faculty and staff and on increasing areas of common interest among teachers involved in school improvement work.

Findings/Results

An e-mail network significantly improved the effectiveness of the cluster by compensating for scheduling conflicts: Cluster information now can be shared with all cluster members without delays. Alternative scheduling is beginning to cut down on the amount of student movement during the day, reducing the opportunities for problems between classes. Cluster has led to more favorable discussions among faculty members about school improvement work, broadening support for restructuring initiatives at the individual school level.

Greater Houston Regional Networking Cluster

Participating Schools

Davis High School
Hitchcock High School
LaPorte High School
Jack Yates High School
Westbury High School
Madison High School

1994-95 Activities

- Teacher/staff study groups focused on professional development topics.
- E-mail network established to facilitate ongoing communications among cluster participants.
- School visits/networking meetings involving faculty and staff.
- Professional development workshops.
- Participation in CES/Re:Learning conferences and forums.

Total Expenditures

$19,900

Current Status

This cluster continues its efforts to achieve school improvement through a variety of networking activities. These include regular meetings among participants to discuss the Nine Common Principles and other school-improvement strategies, joint participation in professional-development workshops and conferences, school visits and a one-day conference designed to expose other schools to the work within the cluster.

Findings/Results

Cluster participation has helped deepen the conversation about school change by providing a supportive network of peers and colleagues. The collaboration also helps individual school staffs avoid unnecessary mistakes or wasted effort. The cluster plays a role in building community support for school change and gives education professionals the opportunity to learn from one another.

Cluster schools also have shown improvements in student achievement, as measured by the annual Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. Grade 10 Exit Level scores on all tests indicate the three schools' progress:

School	% Passing - '95	% Passing - '96
Madison	29	45
Westbury	40	43
Yates	17	22

St. Louis Cluster I

Participating Schools

Kirkwood High School
McCluer High School
Parkway South High School
Ritenour High School
University City High School

1994-95 Activities

- Established a network of teachers across the five schools who meet regularly to share successful classroom practices.
- Scheduled student forums across the five schools, giving students periodic opportunities to visit other campuses and discuss the impact of school improvement efforts on their education.
- Planning retreat.
- Professional development workshops, attended by teams of teachers from cluster schools.

Total Expenditures

$20,000

Current Status

Cluster activity created strong bonds among the faculties at participating schools, leading to their commitment to continue networking in 1996 and beyond. Cluster participants played a leadership role in designing and forming the new CES Regional Center at St. Louis in 1995.

Findings/Results

Cluster work provided a valuable way for participating schools to gain new perspectives on their school-improvement efforts. Participants found that breaking out of the daily routine often led to new insights about strategies for change. The network also provided an important source of affirmation and support for restructuring initiatives, allowing teachers at different schools to deepen their respect and appreciation for the work their peers are doing at other schools in the community. Involving students in the cluster conversations helped expand their sense of ownership in the changes that affected the classroom experience.

St. Louis Cluster II

Participating Schools

Ritenour High School
Hoech Middle School
Marvin Elementary School
Bruce School
Chaney School
A.B. Green Middle School
Maplewood/Richmond Heights High School

1994-95 Activities

- Workshops on student-as-worker metaphor (47 participants, representing all 7 schools).
- Workshops on alternative assessment methods.
- Ongoing focus group discussions among faculty members regarding workshop topics.

Total Expenditures

$20,000

Current Status

Data unavailable

Findings/Results

Clustering grant made it possible to train a large cadre of teachers at seven different schools. The grant extended the impact of the training to include a number of teachers who had not previously been involved in Re:Learning work. In addition, the clustering activities encouraged several teachers to become involved in broader, policy-level projects, including the Missouri MAP 2000 statewide assessment project and the Ritenour School District's Performance Assessment Pilot.

Mid-Missouri Cluster

Participating Schools

Henry County School District
Fayette School District
Fulton School District
Central Missouri State University
Central Methodist College
William Woods University
University of Missouri-Columbia

1994-95 Activities

- Inservice work to explore and integrate Nine Common Principles at member schools.
- Creation of TRAC team (Team of Re:Learning Associates for Change) to provide critical friends' support for Re:Learning practices.
- Two faculty retreats and numerous in-person contacts among cluster participants, including the creation of an e-mail network and newsletter.
- Participation in CES Fall Forum, with cluster members compiling a single report for distribution to all cluster members.
- Establishment of a resource center for cluster participants.

Total Expenditures

$19,936

Current Status

Cluster members have committed to continue their activities and have set long- and short-term goals for the network. Long-term expectations include finding permanent funding sources for cluster activities, expanding the cluster's impact to include other schools in the region, establishing a Missouri Re:Learning Faculty to serve member schools and completing the establishment of an e-mail network among all sites.

Findings/Results

The cluster's links between schools and area universities proved extremely valuable, leading to a h[illegible]thy interchange of knowledge, practices, ideas and creative thought. Cluster participants also found their conversations about learning deepened their school-improvement efforts.

Kansas City Cluster I

Participating Schools Center High School
Raymore-Peculiar High School
Harrisonville Middle School (Year I)
Pleasant High School (Year II)

1994-95 Activities

- Teacher team meetings/school visits to discuss the Nine Common Principles.
- Student team meetings/school visits to invite student participation in restructuring process.
- "Trek" training — Three district teams, with follow-up "critical friends'" visits. (The Trek is a year-long activity to help school faculties visualize and implement plans for change in their school. Trek teams from three schools work together as "critical friends" during the following year to support and critique each school's change efforts.)

Total Expenditures
$20,000

Current Status
The cluster expects to sponsor two major activities in early 1996-97: a teacher retreat and student visits/workshops. The cluster will be disbanded following these activities because of leadership changes at all participating schools, the withdrawal of Harrisonville Middle School and its replacement with a school more than an hour's drive away, and a negative reaction to restructuring activities from the board of Center School District.

Findings/Results
Cluster activities provided an opportunity for regular, in-depth discussions about the Nine Common Principles, as well as opportunities to build peer support and learn from other participants' experiences. Participants found that student involvement added depth and richness to restructuring activities and said the cluster's activities contributed to establishment of a regional CES/Re:Learning Center at Kansas City. Cluster participants also found they should not rely too heavily on leadership from principals because the change process can short-circuit if principals take on new positions.

Kansas City Cluster II

Participating Schools Benton High School
Belton High School
North Kansas City High School

1994-95 Activities

- School visits to facilitate faculty discussions concerning the Nine Common Principles.
- Student/school visits, designed to introduce students to the Nine Common Principles.
- Cooperative inservice training sessions conducted by cluster faculty and by outside trainers.
- Release time for teachers to observe their peers' classroom techniques/strategies.
- E-mail network established to link cluster school sites.
- Resource materials purchased to establish a professional development library.
- Participation in regional CES Spring Forum.

Total Expenditures:
$11,358

Current Status
The cluster did not apply for a second-year grant and has disbanded because of a variety of factors, including changes in building-level leadership, geographic distance (requiring two hours or more of travel time for cluster activities) and external mandates such as the Missouri School Improvement Process, which diverted energy and resources away from cluster activities.

Findings/Results
The cluster's initial conversations and meetings were seen as productive ways to deepen the restructuring work under way at individual schools. Cluster members also found that joint inservice activities were successful, both in terms of professional development and building community support for restructuring activities. Time constraints related to the distance between schools ultimately limited the effectiveness of the cluster, although the individual schools remain active in Re:Learning work.

For More Information

For more information about school clusters or Re:Learning, contact the Education Commission of the States, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; 303-299-3600.

For more information about the Coalition of Essential Schools, contact CES at Box 1969, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912; 401-863-3384.

Appendix: Coalition of Essential Schools' Nine Common Principles

The Coalition of Essential Schools focuses its work on the following principles:

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation — an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the student's demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10%. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

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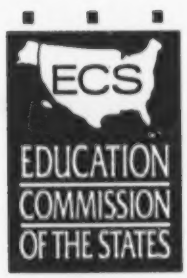

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